Gamers versus zombies?

Visual mediation of the citizen/noncitizen encounter in Europe's 'refugee crisis'

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Abstract

This article identifies the visual representation of Europe's 'refugee crisis' in the media as a key dimension of the communicative architecture of the crisis and its aftermath. Effectively, it argues, the powerful, even iconic, imagery that the media produced and shared during the 2015 'crisis' affirmed ideological frames of incompatible difference, perpetually dividing European citizens and refugees. The paper focuses on some of the fundamental elements of the 2015 crisis's visual grammar to demonstrate how they have (re-)produced popular fears of strangeness and the need for containment and control of foreign bodies. This visual grammar, we argue, imitated and procreated recognisable representations of popular culture to exaggerate newcomers' strangeness and incompatible difference from the national subject. On the one hand, many news media simulated zombies' threatening strangeness in images of refugee massification; on the other, many news media images reaffirmed the decisive power of the national subject over refugees' fate, not unlike the video game player who unilaterally controls a game and takes action when confronted by zombies. This grammar, we argue, symbolically predetermines encounters between citizens and refugees, by emphasising their incompatible difference and newcomers' strangeness.

Keywords: refugees, migration, zombification, mediation of migration, media intertextuality, encounter.

Introduction

In the aftermath of Europe's 2015 'refugee crisis', both academic scholarship and critical journalism have identified media representations of the newcomers as part of a fragile politics of reception (Bellardi et al., 2018; Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015; Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017; Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2016; The European Journalism Observatory, 2015). This line of critique has argued that the media have set strict discursive parameters for seeing refugees within a narrow binary, either as victims or as perpetrators—thus allowing the refugees[1] little space to speak and Europe little space to recognise them (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017; Horsti, 2016; Wilmott, 2017). Paradoxically, this critique has indirectly contributed to the very divide between citizens and noncitizens that it aimed to problematise: by empirically and analytically focussing on refugees alone, it assumed that newcomers' preexisting and essential difference determined Europe's response to their arrival. In this article, we aim to problematise this indirect ordering of citizens and noncitizens in the literature, and instead argue that the encounter between those receiving and those arriving shaped, not just reproduced, the 'refugee crisis' power structures. More specifically, we focus on the mediated encounter as the initial kind of encounter that shaped (im-)possibilities of other kinds of encounters and of newcomers' recognition during and after the 'refugee crisis'. We examine the visual grammar of the news media iconography of the peak of 'the crisis' in 2015 where we observe powerful visual representations setting rules for seeing refugees, not just as external Others, but as strangers who are constituted through their encounters with Europeans and with Europe.

Inspired by Ahmed's (2000) conceptualisation of the encounter, we analyse the visual representations of the crisis as critical, mediated encounters that discursively articulate refugees' identities and intentions through and against the national subject. We focus on one of the two key dimensions of news media's visual mediation of 'the crisis', more particularly refugees' representations as faceless, massified subjects, mostly defined by masculine, primitive power. We counterpoise to these images the representational hypervisibility/invisibility of the national subject, emphasising that this representational frame requires further analytical attention in order to understand the relational construction of refugees' Otherness. Images of massified, faceless refugees and virulent citizens are not the only kind of pictures in the news media during the crisis; in fact, literature shows that 'the crisis' was mediated through contradictory representational frames precariously shifting between refugees' abject vulnerability and threatening Otherness (Berry et al., 2015; Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2016; Wilmott, 2017). Yet, we argue, a dialogical analysis of images of refugees as threats and citizens as heroes advances understandings of media's role in social imaginaries that eventually defined whether refugees can or should live among citizens.

[1] Throughout the article we use the word 'refugee' on the basis of new arrivals' self-identification. The vast majority of people arriving to Europe in 2015 claimed asylum (Chouliaraki et al., 2017), even if for many this claim was unsuccessful. While international and national governance defines refugees on the basis of successful claims to asylum (https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html), this requirement excludes many people from a definition that is granted on the basis of legal or political expectations.

More specifically, we argue, this visual grammar of 'the crisis' created powerful exaggerations of newcomers' strangeness and incompatible difference from the national subject by imitating and procreating recognisable popular culture associations with fear and super-power. On the one hand, many news media simulated zombies' threatening strangeness in images of refugee massification; on the other, many news media images reaffirmed the decisive power of the national subject over refugees' fate, not unlike the video game player who unilaterally takes action when confronted by zombies. This grammar visually strengthens imaginings of incompatible difference, what we refer to as *mediated strangeness*. As these images visualised discourses of fundamentally incompatible, set subjectivities for refugees and Europeans, they visually privileged mediated encounters (safe but distant) against embodied encounters (proximate but risky). Drawing from a visual analysis of 111 media images in 11 countries, this article enquires the kind of ontology of *citizen* and *noncitizen* media images of citizens and noncitizens construct, and it asks whether these constructions identify the encounter in terms of a possible coexistence or, rather, a separation.

The article addresses these questions firstly by conceptually contextualising the discussion. It then moves to the analysis of news media imagery that visually constitutes 'the crisis' through the (potential) encounter between threatening newcomers and heroic citizens, using the parallels of the figures of zombies and gamers, respectively. This analysis explores the video game trope as revealing of the two diverging kinds of agency in the media images–that of the zombie refugees and the game hero Europeans. While the video game player is 'outside' the game, in fact she or he represents the most powerful figure *of* and *in* the game, as she or he both controls the plot and has the power to choose the avatar manipulating its narrative. This binary and inherently unequal relationship between the gamer and the zombie captures some of the most powerful visual representational regimes that frame mediated encounters between citizens and noncitizens. The article concludes by identifying the meaning and possible consequences of the mediated encounter in relation to the construction of the stranger–the newcomer who seeks asylum and eventually a new home in Europe, but whose fate is largely predetermined at the point of the initial mediated encounter.

Strange encounters between (zombified) Others and the heroic Self

Discourses surrounding the arrival of approximately a million refugees and migrants to Europe (Frontex, 2016) in 2015 and the continent's subsequent response to those arrivals have significantly influenced politics of migration in Europe and beyond. The arrivals, largely from war-torn Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, were met by national and transnational attempts to balance the humanitarian efforts towards refugees with protective measures that prioritise citizens (Chouliaraki and Zaborowski, 2017; Vaughan-Williams, 2015). The 'refugee crisis' was a highly mediated event and in fact, news media coverage in Europe and across the world continued for months, framing the complex situation as a 'crisis': a sudden time of decision, a difficulty which required solving. The press narratives during the second half of 2015 show a fast-changing emotional landscape: there was a mixture of anxiety and hope in late spring and early summer,

enthusiastic humanitarianism in early autumn, and, ultimately, fear and negativity in late autumn and early winter (Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2016). At the same time, research on the mediation of the refugee influx has raised significant challenges concerning fair and comprehensive journalism in the neoliberal news cycle and has noted how the scarcity of training and resources, editorial pressures, and political influence have translated into simplified press narratives and a certain homogeneity of voices (The European Journalism Observatory, 2015). Press media mattered, especially as the peak of the crisis, as for readers across the world they constituted the primary source for making sense of the events (Berry et al., 2015; Chouliaraki et al., 2017).

While scholars have examined the representation of migrants and refugees in the news since the beginning of 'the crisis' (Bellardi et al. 2018; Berry et al. 2015; Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017; Georgiou and Zaborowski 2016; The European Journalism Observatory 2015; Wilmott, 2017), their encounter with Europeans has received little attention. Migration politics and public suspicion towards refugees have mostly been interpreted as the refusal of European media and publics to recognise cultural difference. Yet, such critiques have often assumed newcomers' pre-existing and set Otherness. Starting from difference as a set position rather than as a discursive construct misidentifies the encounter between citizens and noncitizens as an encounter *with* difference rather than as an encounter *constitutive of* difference. It is in this context that Ahmed (2000) tackles assumptions of strangers as 'being' prior to social relations. In her critique, she discusses the constitution of 'the alien' as a figure who is considered impossible to recognise, when in fact the alien is always recognised as the ubiquitous figure of difference marking the distinction between the human and the nonhuman. The alien is fundamentally different, while also disgusting and dangerous; thus, disgust at the abjection of alien forms allow us 'to contain ourselves…We recuperate all that is dangerous about the unknown into the singularity of the alien form: danger is not only projected onto the outside*, but the outside is contained within a figure we imagine we have already faced*' (2000, p.2, emphasis in original).

In this definition, an encounter is a moment of discursive realisation of ontologies regarding the stranger and the Self. For Ahmed, an 'encounter' is a meeting involving surprise and conflict; it is constitutive of identity in the sense that 'it is only through meeting with an-other that the identity of a given person comes to be inhabited as living' (2000, p.8). Ahmed's encounter works through different economies: encounters as 'face-to-face meetings' involve 'a visual economy of recognition', while 'skin-to-skin' encounters involve 'an economy of touch' (ibid., p.7). The visual mode of recognition is particularly significant in this analysis because of its mediated character: 'This encounter is mediated; it presupposes other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times' (p.7). Understood in this way, the cultural dimension of the encounter results in other cultures appearing strange 'only through coming *too close to home*, that is, through the proximity of the encounter of 'facing' itself' (p.12, emphasis in original).

In order to understand the encounter, this article explores its meaning by relying on two metaphors: the refugee as a zombie and the European populations as video game players. In viewing refugees as zombies, we refer to their representations as anonymous masses, moving

slowly across borders and to the problematics of seeing these people as less than human; in conceptualising citizens as gamers, we refer to their seeming ability to control the outcome of the 'game' and take up various identities—from calm and collected heroes to violent, commanding, battle-ready figures. These are not the only metaphors that could be or indeed have been employed to understand visualities of refugees or, more broadly, strangers. Othering marginalised groups, including refugees, through dehumanisation is certainly an old and common media trope (see Langdon, 2018). The metaphors can be observed, for instance, in World War II propaganda, which in German media likened Jewish people to vermin or fungus (Kohl, 2011) and in the US, where military media visualised Japanese and Germans as lice or cockroaches (Russell, 1996). More recently, media scholars have noted slurs comparing UK migrants to parasites (Musolff, 2015) or mainland Chinese in Hong Kong to locusts (Ong and Lin, 2017).

Unlike those, the zombie vocabulary is particularly relevant here, because it emphasises both massification and dehumanisation, but also the strong intertextual and thus powerful elements of reoccurring visual frames. First, popularised cultural tropes established in public imagination through film and video games present the already familiar stranger to audiences, effectively shaping meanings of the encounter, as discussed in the next section. The zombie/gamer metaphor builds on juxtapositions established by other writing on the representation of migration, such as mediated narratives of us/'normal' and them/ 'other' (Wilmott, 2017), 'freedom fighters' and 'helpless victims' (Ehmer, 2017) or 'rapists' and 'cowards' (Rettberg and Gajjala, 2015). However, the zombie/gamer metaphor goes beyond those figurations, enabling us to understand more about the intertextual discourses in play that mediate the encounter between refugees and Europeans. Conceptualising the figures as a video game zombie and its counterpart is productive in three particular ways. First, the gamer and their game avatar emphasise the interactive aspect of the 'refugee crisis' to audiences in Europe and beyond, pointing to the mediated encounter as perpetually reconstituted through familiar language and identities (Ahmed, 2000). Second, the gamer and the zombie binary reproduces an unequal relationship that normalises the inequality of agency–the gamer in control and the zombie a figure to be controlled. Third, the zombies are not just incomprehensible others like insects or animals, but they share characteristics with the implied 'us', and much like the 'uncanny valley' of humanoid likeness, pointing back to Ahmed's 'visual economy of recognition' (2000, p.7). The zombie metaphor offers a liminal space between humanity and nonhumanity, between an insider and an outsider. This hybrid status is at the same time, familiar, eerie, and unsettling for the audience.

The refugee as zombie

Zombies have been commonly conceptualised as lethargic, monstrous strangers who move around the landscape en masse, surrounding living populations and breaking social relations because of their status as both living and dead (Goto-Jones, 2013). The usefulness of theorising refugees as real-life zombies is rooted in the notion that they, like zombies, are situated in a precarious space at 'the civic and social border which determines the difference between the living and dead' (Lauro and Embry, 2008, p.104). Fears of the zombie's Otherness and its position as a boundary

figure stem from its status as neither agentive nor passive, neither powerful nor powerless. In the same vein, fears of invasion and difference are strongly evoked in news media portrayals of incoming migrants and refugees. Papastergiadis (2009) calls on Memmi's description of a second generation migrant as a 'sort of a zombie, lacking any profound attachment to the soil on which he was born'; not completely French nor Arab. Later, Papastergiadis (2009, p. 157) discusses the self-image of refugees as the living dead, exemplified in the words of a man alienated in an offshore camp for several years who felt like a 'dead living thing'.

Game studies scholars note the potential of the zombie figure as an ideal video game enemy, as they are 'strong, relentless, and already dead; they look spectacularly horrific; and they invite the player to blow them away without guilt or a second thought' (Krzywinska, 2008, p. 153). The hybrid status of a zombie allows it to take on a number of cultural positions as an antagonist who 'can be, by turns, threatening, pathetic, comic and pleasurable' (Hunt, 2015, p. 107), but always without agency and always in opposition to the player character (see Backe and Aarseth, 2013 for a review of the concept and zombie archetypes in modern video games history).

As a metaphor, the zombie is useful in exploring what the presence of an animate body without subjectivity signifies, what fears it evokes, and what might happen if zombies, in their uninhibited state, infest 'our' society. While much has been written about the notion of the zombie in popular culture and society, starting with its origin myth in Haitian folklore, it is the analytical usefulness of this figure in studies of the posthuman that this analysis draws upon. Within this critique, the zombie metaphor highlights two fears which are based on its status as a boundary figure: (i.) the fear of the zombie's unconscious, disruptive power and (ii.) the fear of the zombie's alien (foreign) body (especially important in the context of anxieties surrounding migration).

The zombie, whose undead body and unconscious mind display difference, evokes fears that highlight both the presence and the absence of power. The zombie is powerful in that it defies death, spreads infection, and transfers its enslavement to a host, all of which give rise to fears of the Other's agency (Lauro and Embry, 2008, p. 98). Simultaneously, the zombie is powerless to rid itself of 'zombification', thus transferring and spreading its affliction without the possibility of redemption (Paffenroth, 2011). This irrational state amplifies the zombie's dehumanisation and gives rise to fears of uncertainty and infection (Goto-Jones, 2013); walking mindlessly toward the uninfected, zombies generate fear because of their ability to multiply and overrun, which solidifies their status as less than human. Examining the zombie through its threat to social order, we can draw a parallel between the fear of zombies and the discursive constructions of anxiety related to the arrival of refugees at European shores since the start of 'the crisis'.

Importantly, the figure of the zombie carries certain ambivalence destabilising capitalist and national order. Marked by difference and a lack of agency, the zombie is unable to establish a political identity. In its conception as an external threat, the zombie stands as a symbol of a foreign invasion and yet remains rejected from the realm of social responsibility. The 'zombification' of the Other through dehumanisation serves to justify state violence and punitive policing because of the zombie's threatening image in the social imaginary (Linnemann et al.,

2014). Echoing ideas proposed in the conceptual provocation of what its authors (Lauro and Embry, 2008) refer to as 'The Zombie Manifesto', critics have warned that the news media's construction of the dispossessed as the walking dead sets a dangerous precedent that ultimately helps to justify state securitisation (Linnemann et al., 2014). Because zombies are perceived as neither dead nor alive, social codes of conduct do not fully apply to them (Žižek, 2007). Žižek (2008) has further warned against such a 'fetishistic disavowal' of state violence, enabled by the depoliticisation of violence and resulting in public tolerance of it, because it obscures larger ideological forces at work. Zombification, then, goes beyond mere escapism and ideologically disavows 'the very real, human, material circumstances and consequences' (Linnemann et al., 2014, p. 509).

Europeans as video game players

In a dialectical relationship with the zombie as a metaphor for the refugee, video game players (gamers) become a metaphor for the populations of receiving countries. This article proposes that video games discursively construct various agentive identities for gamers, whether heroic, authoritarian, or violent. The gamer metaphor helps to draw out the political implications of agency in refugee and host populations. Video games and their users have attracted some attention among media and communications scholars over the past twenty years since it has become increasingly apparent that gaming constitutes a considerable portion of the media diet among certain population groups. Spurred on by the recognition that video games contain complex discursive symbols which could have a significant social impact, such studies have explored topics of violence, gender, race, and sexuality, investigating how video games are embedded in neoliberal society (Williams et al., 2009). Exploring the constructed identities available to gamers is, therefore, a larger field of literature, but within that field, analyses of gamers' agency and the political implications of this agency have not received much scholarly attention (Muriel and Crawford, 2018).

In zombie video games, players are represented by in-game avatars, either visible authority figures or invisible, implied characters in first-person-perspective games. In both, player identification emerges from a range of factors in a fluid, dynamic process (Taylor et al., 2015), but their character always stands in opposition to the hordes of zombie enemies: an integral part of the game world, responsible for the direction of the plot. Game design ensures this by positioning combat as a strategic necessity: shooting zombies does not equal killing, but rather "declassifying" or "neutralising" them so their status is finally resolved and they may "neatly exit the gamespace" (Carr, 2009).

The lack of diversity in video game characters goes beyond pre-constructed protagonists; even when a given game allows players to craft their own characters, options for creating non-White avatars are often limited (Dietrich, 2013). Williams et al. (2009) have suggested that this imbalance in game character representations could have an impact on how we perceive the prevalence of particular social groups, power balances, and the formation of stereotypes. Feminist theorists (see, for instance, Irigaray, 1985) have similarly argued that the saturation of a particular kind of

identity results in an imagination of the dominant group as the norm. The same line of argumentation exists in racial politics, where the dominance of White men as leaders and thinkers is based both on an Orientalist imagination of the Other as savage and uncivilised and on postcolonial, sociopolitical, and cultural structures of white supremacy. The implications are the same for gendered and racialised bodies, who are deemed not fully human and, therefore, unsuitable for political participation. As a result, the dominant identity, as it is reproduced and mediated, excludes other forms of identity and causes fear when threatened. Again, one can observe the parallels with migrants and refugees, and just as 'the fear of fusion, of the boundaries bleeding into each other, drains ideal political man ... of the strength he derives from the separation' (Puwar, 2004, p.17), so the refugee, crossing physical and symbolic boundaries, represents an existential fear of visibility and of a threat, while the young, White man represents the person in charge of the 'game'.

A note on methodology

This study proceeds from previous research which analysed 1200 news stories on 'the refugee crisis' from broadsheet news outlets in eight European countries between July and November 2015 (Chouliaraki, Georgiou, & Zaborowski, 2017). Building on these findings, the current article uses new data—media images not previously analysed—and at the same time extends the geographic range of inquiry into Italy, Sweden, North America (the U.S. and Canada), and India. Specifically, this article draws on the visual analysis of 111 images across 37 media outlets in 11 countries, including European Arab media[2]. The media studied expand across and beyond European territories, in aiming to examine whether the visual grammar that indexes the 'crisis' agents and their bodies through mediated encounters is geographically rooted in Europe or globally articulated through the reproduction (or destabilisation) of hierarchies between White/non-White and citizen/noncitizen categories. For each country, three media outlets were selected: two broadsheets (representing left- and right-leaning editorial stances where possible) and a television channel in order to capture the diverse range of ideological and representational narratives that informed the construction of 'the crisis'. From each media outlet three images were sampled, corresponding to three key moments during the crisis: (i.) Hungary erecting a physical barrier along its borders with Serbia (13 July 2015); (ii.) the drowning of the toddler Alan Kurdi in the Mediterranean (3 September 2015); and (iii.) the terror attacks in Paris (13 November 2015). In following Hall's (1997, p.6) definition of discourse as a social practice operating through symbols so as to produce subjectivities, visual analysis was conducted on the images, combining elements of semiotic and visual discourse analysis which were driven by the framework of visibility and agency. The visual analysis focused on two overarching questions: (i.) who is represented on

[2] The media analysed were: Alaraby Al Jadeed, Al Hayat and Al Jazeera (Arab European/Middle East), The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star and CBS (Canada), Le Figaro and Le Monde (France), Suddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurther Allgemenine Zeitung and Das Erste (Germany), EFSYN, Kathimerini and ANT1 (Greece), Nepszabadsag, Magyar Nemzet and M1 (Hungary), Times of India, Hindustan Times and NDTV (India), Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica and TgCom24 (Italy), Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet and SVT (Sweden), The Independent, The Guardian, The Times, The Telegraph, and BBC (UK), Irish Times, Irish Independent and RTE 9 (Ireland), Wall Street Journal, New York Times and CNN (US).

the images, and (ii.) how do competing representations cohabit within the symbolic space and thus become meaningful? Through a number of analytical categories, which consisted of linguistic messages/captions, of denoted and connoted aspects of the images (cf. Barthes, 1964), and of dimensions of genre and intertextuality (cf. Kristeva, 1980), the overarching trends emerging from the data (including elements of zombie/gamer visualities) were mapped across the images.

Discussion and analysis I: Mediated encounters

The visual analysis helped construct a two-level comparative analysis of the dichotomous representations of citizens and refugees. The first level of analysis captures the overall narratives that, respectively, shape mutually oppositional constitutions of the two key actors of the crisis: the hypervisible, alien figure of the refugee and the paradoxically contradictory figure of the citizen as either hypervisible or invisible figure that holds enormous amount of power. The second level of analysis (discussed in the next section in more detail) identifies and details how these overall narratives produced the zombification of refugees against the determined and determining power of the gamer–the citizen.

Across the 11-country sample of refugee representations, the visual analysis identified three reappearing visual narratives of the refugee: refugee facelessness, voicelessness, and threatening masculinity. These visual narratives are not unique among the sample, but their persistent reappearance is symbolically significant as it helps us understand how refugees have become a globally circulated category of reduced, even threatening, humanity. These visual narratives are contrasted with the representation of Europeans/citizens; in this case, we observe a visual paradox that reaffirms symbolic power: citizens are either hypervisible, especially in the figures of national/European Union (EU) authorities and military personnel, or fully invisible, being visually absent but fully implied as present through the gaze toward the alien Others fully exposed in news media images. Invisibility and hypervisibility in this case work in conjunction, especially as they both visually affirm unquestioned and assumed authority and power of the national subject over the noncitizen Others: those that are fully exposed to the authority and the audience to observe, scrutinize, and judge. This unequal representation of symbolic power mobilised two effective discursive systems: familiar articulations of strangeness that drew on historical regimes of difference and power (Ahmed, 2000) and media narrations of the Self and the (threatening) Other through familiar figures from popular culture–in the case of this analysis, the zombie and the video game player.

In practice, this visual politics was repeatedly and persistently expressed in images of refugees as faceless masses or individuals who lack individual experience and are deprived from dignity. While the visualisation of deprivation, especially at the peak of ‘the crisis’, appeared as a result of their plight, refugees’ humanity remained reduced to a state of diminished agency; as refugees rarely achieved a state of equal representational status on par with citizens’ complex humanity, it became easier over time to replace the visual dominance of the refugee as victim to the refugee as threat. For example, the now-iconic images of refugees on cramped boats in the Mediterranean, established a ‘monitorial’ gaze over the plight of many; this plight was

represented as moving masses of bodies and reproduced in publications from India to the U.S. to Ireland. These monitorial images offer a top-down bird's-eye view of an invisible but fully powerful citizen who observes and decides on the fate of newcomers as they become more proximate. Such images, reproduced across boundaries (e.g., Le Figaro, 16 November; Hindustan Times, 22 November), generalised and decontextualized individual conditions and refugee plight, literally positioning refugees in the middle of a contextless environment — the spacious, vacuous blue sea. Such images walked a fine line between representations of news events and artistic images with refugees as subjects who, without consent, were contributing to art and news. We could further argue that the context-less appearance of newcomers leaves the contextualising power of defining the meaning of their plight and of their fate to those receiving them at the moment of the encounter. While the refugees *appeared* as victims, the literally faceless and hierarchical representation of their condition and the reproduction of this condition through photographic angles of exteriority and top-down direction reaffirmed the safe and controlled distance of the refugees from the citizen-spectator, being emotionally and spatially unfamiliar with the refugee condition.

Alongside the massification of adult refugee representations, images repeatedly infantilised the refugees, especially through top-down or close-up camera shots of children's faces. Such images often appeared in German and Hungarian media, for example (SZ, 5 September; Tagesschau, 7 September; Magyar Nemzet, 13 July; M1, 15 November), representing more sympathetic representations of refugees, but equally reducing them to voiceless and agent-less subjects to Western authority and care. This second set of images produces in a way different to the massified refugee representations a monitorial visual aesthetics and, arguably, a monitorial ethos that oversees, contains, and interprets others' experience through overwhelmingly unequal power relations that deem those receiving capable of making decisions on behalf of and for those arriving. In most of the images of cramped boats and suffering children, the Western, citizen actors remain invisible, yet those are the actors who control the iconography, the space, and the potential solution to the crisis. These representations go hand in hand with the voicelessness of the refugee. For the images analysed, both on television and in the press, refugees hardly ever spoke, while the newsmakers and humanitarian/security authorities spoke about them or on their behalf and interpreted the developments through voiceovers or image captions.

The facelessness and infantilization of refugees as victims made possible, and even justified, the second set of representation of refugees: as threatening aliens. In fact, visualisations of adult–especially male–refugees built on a representational order of 'the crisis' that left little space for empathetic identification with newcomers as agents a par to citizens. In fact, as refugees had no voice in most of 'the crisis' news media coverage, their reduced humanity as voiceless victims could easily shift to a reduced humanity as threatening Others. For example, masculinity of Others was repeatedly projected as aggressive, a formed identity that generates fear and concern about citizens' safety and well-being, unlike the innocent and helpless child who is easy to contain. In a Canadian press image (The Globe and Mail, 11 July), young men were represented as untroubled economic migrants; in three of the images analysed in the British media (BBC, 14 July; The

Guardian, 1 August; The Telegraph, 30 July), young men appeared as strong and capable (and thus possibly deprived of the right to support and care); another German image (FAZ, 15 July) reaffirmed their threatening Otherness by representing refugees as capable rioters at borders, ready to confront border police. Visual masculine strength and dynamic resistance to fences and rising borders appeared to reaffirm refugees' aggressive determination and capabilities. However, these acts are not indicative of their agentive possibilities but instead constitute threatening acts, alienating the refugees from the audiences and from their own moral responsibility. In many of these images (often combined with massification), masculine power becomes a reminder of the threatening potential of the male Other, with the emphasis on strong bodies and dark faces serving as reminders of narratives of the Orientalist threatening masculinity (Khalid, 2011; Said, 1979).

Against the set but inherently contradictory figure of the refugee, the visual representations of Europeans are equally powerful in conditioning publics to imagine, interpret, and act upon 'the crisis'. In fact, the visual representation of Europeans is always tied to the representation of refugees, thus reflecting the fundamental dependence of ideological frames of rights, recognition, and responsibility upon the discursive construction of the citizen and the noncitizen (Isin, 2002). There is, however, a paradox in this condition and its visual representation: the European is not usually the subject discursively and visually identified with 'the refugee crisis'; the European remains invisible, but it is precisely in this invisibility that the citizen is reaffirmed as ever-present, as the norm (of appearance, emotions, needs). Like gamers, European agents are mostly unseen, but almost always implied– through the gaze, through the photojournalism that speaks on behalf of an imagined community, and through the interpretation of the crisis, as implied by the visuality of its representations. Accordingly, the meeting of the refugee and the European has to be understood as a mediated encounter that is only partly realised through the direct representation of the European agent; it is built on a preexisting knowledge of the mediated encounter (Ahmed, 2000). In fact, it is an encounter so uneven that the more powerful of its two actors can be imagined and assumed in that preexisting knowledge of the stranger. For the citizen, there is no need for representation; a nonrepresentational reproduction of the national community's power seems to travel well across borders and in the reproduction of imagery of 'the crisis' in national media across the world. The national subject may be invisible, but it is implied through the top-down camera gaze falling on a refugee boy (Tagesschau, 7 September) or directed down and across a barrier toward children reaching for food (CBS, 16 November). Yet the newsworthiness of the events is effectively the encounter (or the prospect of one) with strangers, as a result of refugee movements across borders. In this context, 'the crisis' was represented not as one of war and mass exodus, but primarily as a matter of border crossing. Whether visualised by refugees passing document checkpoints at transit centres (Al Jazeera, 16 November) or refugees hiding on trucks (BBC, 14 July), 'the crisis' becomes identified as such when strangers' bodies cross Europe's borders, becoming proximate, possible participants in an embodied (and possibly dangerous) encounter with citizens. In the intense media-based representations and formulations of the visual grammar of those encounters, audiences became prepared to experience or to avoid the encounter in its physical and embodied incarnations.

Discussion and analysis II: Mediating incompatible (in)humanity

The results suggest that visual and semiotic elements in the media images prioritise the dehumanising narratives of refugees and their lives and position them as the living dead–zombies. Either vulnerable and passive or violent and active, the refugees in the pictures are concealed, massified, patronised, and thus constituted as inferior to Europeans who emerge from the images as video game protagonists–'heroes'.

Refugees and migrants appeared in media images either as children (vulnerable and passive) or more often, and especially in the later periods of the 'crisis', as masses of predominantly young men. The first trend is represented through the body of Alan Kurdi; the iconic image of the little boy was transmitted rapidly across traditional and new media, both in its original form and as a source of artistic and remix work (cf. El Enany, 2016; Vis and Goriunova, 2015). The second group of images, and the one this article focuses on, involves refugees portrayed in groups: passive in their movements yet intimidating through their presence. In such images, the agency of the refugees is limited to basic movements: they sit or sleep, they come toward us seemingly without intent beyond the aim of occupying 'our' European space. When the refugees move, their individual characteristics become blurred; in extreme cases, we see only their silhouettes and shadows (Dagens Nyheter, 16 November). They walk often with their heads down, in unison, driven by only one vector–toward us (Magyar Nemzet, 18 November). They may be temporarily stopped by fences (The Telegraph, 3 September), but their liminal status remains a threat to the concerned European public (cf. Gale, 2004; Goto-Jones, 2013).

Meanwhile, the uniformed person of authority appears in the images as an avatar for the European public. The contrast between European and refugee ontology is constructed relationally and played out as such in a number of visual occasions. These may be illustrated through a widely circulated AFP image, which appeared in the German FAZ on 15 July 2015[3]. On the left-hand side, the image shows a French policeman in Calais (as identified in the caption): he is standing on a monticule with a baton in his hand, in front of a barrier structure, and ready to strike. The right-hand side of the image is dominated by a group of six refugees running up the hill toward the opening behind the policeman. 'There is no way here,' proclaims the caption. The imagery triggers immediate mental associations–the juxtaposition of the steady, lone, uniformed White protector and the anxious group of non-White climbers represents a clash between order and chaos. It is also highly symbolic of the general representation of what was hailed as the 'refugee crisis' in the European press during 2015: Europe as a fortress under siege and border forces acting as the last line of defence, fighting insurmountable odds, and fending off masses of dangerous invaders.

From an intertextual perspective, the press image brings to mind the aesthetics of a different genre: an action video game. The camera angle, looking down on the scene, helps divide the image into two imaginary parts, both of which remain intertextually interdependent: a player-controlled safe space and a computer-generated foe territory. We see this dynamic play out

[3] Image available via https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2015/jun/20/the-20-photographs-of-the-week#img-11

through the actors in the image: the foes appear from the edges (the seventh refugee, of whom we can only see a part, belongs to this gaming convention), in large numbers, and zombie-like, while the hero stays firmly within the limits of the image/screen. This is amplified by the iconic pose of the policeman, who seems ready to strike a blow with the push of a button. The succinct caption attributing the phrase 'there is no way here' to the policeman is a game-like catchphrase of a fantasy avatar, such as 'Get over here!' (from 1992's *Mortal Kombat* game), 'I've got a present for ya!' (from 1995's *Command and Conquer* game), or even Gandalf's 'You shall not pass!' (from 2001's *The Fellowship of the Rings* movie). In fact, the only item missing from the convention is player interface, perhaps in a form of a health bar representing the physical condition of the policeman.

In another image from an Italian broadcaster's web page (TGCOM24, 17 July[4]), a Black migrant faces the camera with his hand raised in an accusatory gesture. His body and a part of his face are obstructed by the figure of a still White policeman, whose back is to the reader. Through this composition, the imagined European readership stays on the 'safe' side behind the uniformed man who serves as 'our' character; the caption 'The residents won: immigrants out of the residence' amplifies this message. Similarly, in an image from the Hungarian Magyar Nemzet (3 September, image unavailable online), four uniformed members of the Hungarian Riot Police interact with approximately nine refugees (referred to as 'migrants' and 'crowd'), some of whom are viewed only partially. The actors are represented as two separate entities: the uniformed police in the front, holding the refugees' arms and leading them, and the refugees in the back, walking toward the camera.

The polarity of refugee and policemen figures in these images is not simply indicating a different quality of agency, but it is also constitutive of exclusive and limited types of competing ontologies lmost two different ontologies of existence. The narrative of 'a crisis' aids the juxtaposition of contrasting refugee and authority actors, where one is the source of the crisis and the other constitutes the European response to it. Such simplified visuality of a complex refugee condition leaves no space for different types of agency and mobilises action and fear instead of a nuanced, humanitarian stance. In fact, the encounter with the stranger establishes 'the necessity of policing the borders' (Ahmed 2000, p.3) and reinforces demarcated spaces of belonging as exclusive to those from 'inside' and against those from 'outside'.

As the imagined audience interacts with the video game imagery, the visual elements of the genre provide them with the 'palpable agency' of a video game (Dietrich, 2013), as well as with the link between player action (engagement with the image) and effects on screen (European border policy). Simultaneously, this imagery diminishes the agency of the refugee, who is depicted as the conventional video game foe: massified, anonymous, and facing the player. For example, an image in The Telegraph (3 September[5]) depicts a man in military gear with a large group of refugees behind him and a makeshift fence. In the caption ('A Macedonian policeman carries a crying child

[4] Image available via https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/cronaca/quinto-di-treviso-vincono-i-residenti-immigrati-fuori-dal-residence_2123098-201502a.shtml
[5] Image available via https://secure.i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/03426/migrantsmacedonia_3426838b.jpg

as crowds of refugees wait behind the barbed wire border with Greece'), it is the policeman who carries and the refugees who wait. Refugee agency is reduced to idleness.

In our sample, there were few images portraying refugees without either 'powerless vulnerability' or 'agentive malevolence' (Chouliaraki and Stolic, 2017), although some visualities were more nuanced than others. For instance, an image from Swedish press (Svenska Dagbladet, 3 September[6]), portrayed Mohamed and his daughter Joanna, as identified by the caption, who fled Aleppo to arrive in the German town of Passau. While some aesthetic features of victimhood can be visually identified in the image (the fence-as-border, the unidentified bodies next to the family), many others are not: Mohamed and Johanna do not seem physically vulnerable or in pain, the child does not plead, the family is not guided by a local saviour, the captions identify their names and some personal history.

In the analysed pictures, the citizen remains the preferred position of identity. The avatar for the European public is present in the imagery either directly, as a uniformed authority figure, or indirectly, wherein idle groups of anonymous others walking toward the camera symbolically create an implied protagonist–just as in video games with a first-person viewpoint. The difference between the two points of view might be significant (on how first-person and third-person points of view correlate with the game experience, see Lim and Reeves, 2009), but both perspectives shift the dynamics of voice toward the European structures of border control–the presumed 'us' who ward off 'them'.

The key dynamic emerging from the images is the figure of a refugee as an entity to be managed, not welcomed. The refugees' humanity remains in doubt, not only through their lack of voice but also because of how their interactions with nonrefugee actors are represented. Apart from some rare examples of images depicting citizen solidarity with the refugee cause (ANT1, 15 July; SZ, 16 November), the refugees are portrayed as led or carried, coordinated and managed, stopped or rushed. As dehumanised zombies, they become the ultimate Other, and their nonhuman, nonagentive position justifies escalating securitisation policies and border scrutiny (cf. Linnemann et al., 2014) driven by agentive players (gamers) who take the lead in controlling and saving the people. The securitisation discourse is embedded in both the images and captions represented and provided by the press: the images identify the power disparities between refugees and authority figures, the captions verbalise the need for further control since they imply not only that death and tragedy follow the incoming masses of people wherever they go (Hungarian, Italian press), but also that more refugees will still come (Irish press).

Conclusions: Mediated strangeness

The visualisations of the key agents of 'the refugee crisis' in news media discussed in this analysis have allowed us to contrast the mediated construction of competing ontologies of citizens and noncitizens. As shown, fears and disavowal stem from the impossibility for the zombie/refugee to

[6] Image available via https://images-1.svd.se/v2/images/bceb4c89-c8cb-47b3-b7e1-32af5d30e4a2?fit=crop&h=348&q=70&upscale=true&w=522&s=9a285b77593ed16d7341380cc8d98aa0b070b4e1

overcome the boundary and move into the realm of the political. These fears of difference (Žižek, 2010) give rise to a simple rejection of the Other. The observer remains seemingly neutral and benevolent by not rejecting the Other but instead distancing oneself into the position of a benevolent observer. At that moment, the Other who is legally dead but biologically alive–as refugees and migrants in detention centres or waiting at national borders appear to be in news media–easily becomes what Agamben (1998) has termed 'bare life', or life devoid of the political identity that comes from the ability to assert one's own agency through language. Zombification disguises the dehumanisation of a racialised social order, thereby justifying the fantasy of eliminating the subject's fears with the mechanical causality of a video game. This is possible because bare life has neither the political agency nor the human rights necessary to protect its existence from being annihilated. This boundary status links representations of global migration with the symbolic encounters between the community and the incoming stranger. In the encounter, refugees, like zombies, have no established history of individuality and subjectivity—instead, they become a figure of fear, an entity to be handled and managed. The role of the handler falls into the remit of those structures and individuals whose responsibility it is to make decisions on behalf of the dispossessed. At the same time, the duty to protect against external threats is a crucial narrative principle of video games and symbolically separates the figures of player-based characters (citizens) from those of the enemies (refugees). This separation is visual (the premeditated design of game characters), narrative based (the annihilation of the enemy as a condition for victory; cf. Dietrich, 2013), and intertextual (drawing on the history of video-game genres but also on popular culture in general). Thus, the mediated symbolic encounter can be understood through the discursive frame which regulates the regimes of hospitality and danger.

The zombies remain anonymous and dehumanised but are not completely unknown. The figure of the refugee is, similar to Ahmed's (2000) 'stranger', hardly an unrecognised entity. On the contrary, the refugee is recognised as dangerous or vulnerable through processes of symbolic differentiation in the press and is thus someone we are already familiar with: a threat (zombie) or an object of pity (child). Media encounters are likely to conceal the context and nature of refugees' social relations, voices, and experiences and to condition their presence upon the dichotomy of familiarity and strangeness, thus precluding possibilities of shared publics. Yet the inclusion and exclusion of the stranger are always differentiated, partly because the stranger is fetishized and partly because the encounter is a moment of possibility (Ahmed, 2000). As Ahmed puts it, 'by allowing some aliens to co-exist "with us", we might expand our community: we might prove our advancement into or beyond the human; we might demonstrate our willingness to accept difference and to make it our own' (2000, p. 2). The intimacy with strangers' bodies and experiences through encounters can potentially challenge the boundaries which the construction of predetermined differences imply; the encounter is also a moment of opportunity not only to see refugees as more than set ontologies of strangeness but also to see Others and the Self as more than competing ontological existences.

Mediated strangeness, we conclude, did not merely reflect Europe's ethico-political response to the crisis, but rather it contributed to its formulation as humanitarian securitisation–that is to say,

the need to contain any humanitarian response to newcomers within a strictly controlled system of separation and surveillance (Chouliaraki et al., 2017). The media became both communicators and separators of noncitizens by reinforcing their distance (and the need for that distance) from citizens, who, in turn, become consenting spectators of ritualised, mediated divides. The media alerted audiences to the need to reaffirm space between those receiving and those arriving, and thus indirectly weakened the politics of responsibility toward newcomers. Through the visualisation and factualisation of ideal and familiar media types of gamers and zombies, the encounter between the citizen and noncitizen became both ontologically familiar and communicatively distant: the figures of players and zombies spoke to deep ontological insecurities associated with modernity (Giddens, 1990; Silverstone, 1994), but as mediated figures they also became associated with (fictional) resolutions that take place away from the citizen–the citizen who remains (or should remain) safely distant from the securitisation of migration and humanitarian responsibility.

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